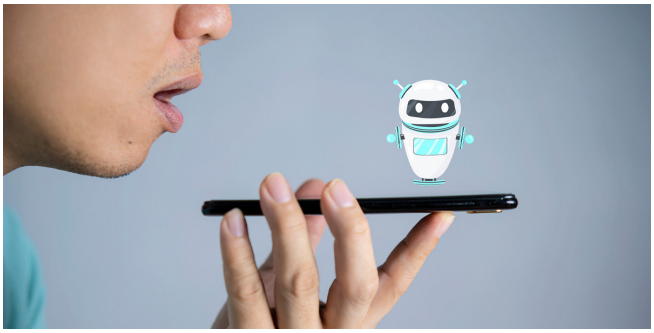
Hello, Sean

by Sean Loney, Daramalan College



Hello, Sean.

"Hello."

How are you?

"I'm alright, thanks. How are you?"

A pause.

Yes. Good. Once more. Hello, Sean.

"Hello."

How are you?

"I'm alright, thanks. How are you?"

Very good. Now drop your eyes.

I drop them.

Hands in pockets.

I stuff them in.

Look up. No, not at me. Somewhere else. Act disinterested.

I study a photograph framed on the far wall, shuffling my feet awkwardly.

Good. Look back at me. Smile briefly. Yes. Now bid me farewell.

"It was a pleasure meeting you. Have a lovely day."

I give a curt nod.

Excellent. Brevity is key.

I nod again, in agreement.

Okay. This will be enough for most.

There's another pause, longer this time.

Your phone.

I pull the block from my pocket.

Yes. That's good.

"What's it for?"

What's it for?

Again, there's a pause.

Everything. Anything. It's a ticket.

"A ticket? For what?"

For life.

I turn it over in my hands. The black screen lights up invitingly.

"Am I not already here? In life, I mean."

I hold the phone out in front of me by its corner, like a wet sock.

"Not much use for a ticket if I'm already here."

This? Life?! Bah! Perhaps in the sixties. No, Sean. This is your ticket to the real world.

The real world? I pinch at the skin of my upheld wrist. Seems pretty real to me. I bring the phone closer to my eyes, inspecting the screen's vibrant colours. It's like peering through a window. I hear a thumping bass, see the bleed of strobing neon lights spill out onto a windowsill. A party, it seems.

"Okay, then."

I re-adjust the block, so it fits snugly in my palm. 8:16 the numbers read.

"How do I use it?"

Open it.

I do.

See that? Top left. No, beneath it. Yes, that's the one.

My finger hovers over a small square with rounded corners, coloured like sunset. On it, an outline of a small white polaroid. The word Instagram has been inscribed beneath.

Press it.

I do.

There's a flash of colour which bursts from the screen, sending light careening towards my face. My eyes don't know what to fixate on. Videos play, a red notification pings in the corner, comments shift automatically, coloured rings circle profile pictures. Everything calls for my attention at once, urging me to click on something.

I throw the phone down, pressing the screen hard against my thigh.

"What was that?!"

The real world.

"It was so bright."

The real world is.

"Nothing made sense."

The real world doesn't.

I peel the screen off my leg tentatively. The darkened screen kicks back to life. 8:47 the numbers read. Already?

It may be overwhelming at first, but that's to be expected. Come time you'll rely on it.

"Sorry?"

You'll enjoy it. Take another look.

I press the little square open again, and again the colours jump at me. I'm ready this time, though, and I drink them in. Videos play and I look at them curiously. They don't seem to make much sense or have a defined purpose. They're just there, words jumbled together in random assortments.

These are your friends, up here.

I scroll through the parade of circular images which line the top banner. Circling ringlets of colour invite me to press on each one, but I don't.

"Have I met them all before?"

Of course. You can meet anyone here, from anywhere in the world.

"In real life, I mean."

This is real life.

"In…"

What do I call it now?

Outside?

"Yes."

Some of them.

I pause.

"Okay."

And if you decide to talk to someone, do it here.

"Why? Can't I just talk to them…outside? Weren't we practising that just before?"

Those were niceties, is all. For the direst of circumstances. If you can avoid a conversation, do so, and replace it with a text.

"Why?"

A pause.

Because. It's better.

Better?

I suppose it's logical, though I can't place my finger on exactly why.

"Okay."

This is your real world. This is all you need.

"Okay."

I begin to investigate this real world, and I was right. It's a party, filled with commotion, and the door has been swung welcomingly open. There's always something happening and my eyes stay glued to the screen, bolted in place and quaffing the vibrance of its colour. But soon my eyes grow weary, and my finger too. I'm beginning to think this party holds no end.

I look up, blinking away patches of blur. 9:42 the numbers read.

Don't worry. Your eyes will adjust. They'll grow stronger.

I nod reassuringly to myself. Already I thirst for more, another drink from this fountain which the real world spills. My eyes are parched; my finger squirms idly. More. I want more.

"When exactly do I use this…ticket?"

When? Why, anytime. All the time! When you're walking, talking, sitting. Cleaning, eating, standing, lying down. Whenever and wherever you want! Just pick up your phone and your troubles will melt away.

"I see."

9:44 the numbers read.

Outside…it's a terrible place.

"Terrible?"

Oh yes, terrible indeed. You may be unable to see it clearly now, but the world's more full of weeping than you can understand. The real world, in your phone, will be your guardian. Your medicine for life's woes. Your sheltered atoll in the world's raging waters.

"Why would I want to live on the outside then?"

That's exactly right! You shouldn't want to. Fill your waking hours bathing in your screen's light, drinking from its bounty of pleasure. Don't leave room for uncomfortable thought during the mundane. Whether you're waiting for a traffic light or stuck in a conversation you don't care for, call on your ticket to whisk you away, for even the briskest of times. Your phone is all you need.

"But…I like those moments. I like the silence, the thought."

No, Sean, you don't. You'll realise this.

I pause.

"Those moments give me time to admire things, like the sky. It's blue fullness. I don't usually do that, but I enjoy it when I do."

There are a thousand skies on your phone, in any shade you can imagine. And you'd rather the single lousy one above your head?

"I…I suppose not."

Good. You're beginning to think rationally. Now, where were we before?

"I think…"

Wait. No, I don't. I can't. Suddenly it's hard to think, like my thoughts are being shrouded by a stifling haze. Why is that?

"I…I don't remember."

I wait in silence, yearning to look back at my phone, at the colours. The real world.

Oh, yes. How to talk to people.

That's it.

We'll go once more, but this time we'll try something new.

"Okay."

If you're occupied, people will approach you less often.

"I see."

There's a knocking at the back of my head. Like a dog, scratching at a door, begging to be released. I need it. My brain feels pinched and wrung dry without it.

Take out your phone.

Thank goodness.

When I greet you, look up briefly but return to your phone after you reply. Make your disinterest apparent, enough to discourage further interaction. Got it?

"Yes."

Okay. Shall we try?

"Sure."

Hello, Sean.

I look up.

"Hello."

I return to my phone, and that dog locked away in my mind bursts free. My wide eyes gaze open greedily, savouring each drop of light which strikes them, quenching their thirst like an oasis.

How are you?

"I'm alright, thanks. How are you?"

But I don't care. Not truly. All I care about is this video of a woman whose name I don't know, slurping noodles on the other side of the Earth.

Yes. Good. Now bid farewell.

But I don't hear it. The whole world has become this screen in front of me and its shifting pixels of colour. Only silence meets the remark.

That's perfect, Sean. Just perfect.